

Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis

The farm crisis and the climate crisis share many of the same causes, and many of the same solutions.

The National Farmers Union 2019 report, **Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis: A Transformative Strategy for Canadian Farmers and Food Systems** examines how climate change impacts agriculture in Canada and how farmers can be part of the solution.

The report is one of the most comprehensive analyses of agriculture and climate change in Canada.

The climate crisis

- ⇒ is a threat and also an opportunity to re-orient our farms.
- ⇒ was caused by the same dynamics that created the farm income crisis.
- ⇒ will increasingly affect Canadian farms' ability to produce food.
- ⇒ needs us to adopt low-input, low-emission approaches.

Climate change is real, unfolding rapidly, causing destruction, and accelerating. Unless we restructure our energy, manufacturing, transportation, communication, and food systems, our society and ecosystems will be devastated. It will impair farming and food production in many areas of Canada and this will impact the entire economy.

The farm crisis

Canadian farm debt, now \$106 billion, has nearly doubled since 2000. Since 1990, the corporations that supply fertilizers, chemicals, machinery, fuels, technologies, services, credit, etc., have captured nearly all farm revenues, leaving farmers with just 5%. The majority of farm family household income now comes from off-farm work, taxpayer-funded support programs, and other non-farm sources.

In the last thirty years, a third of Canadian farm families have been pushed off the land. We've lost over two-thirds of our young farmers since 1991.

The climate crisis *and* the farm crisis

We *can* change course!

The journey to a future that includes family farms, vibrant communities, and a habitable climate begins when we understand: the farm crisis and the climate crisis share many of the same solutions.

Farmers have been pushed to adopt a maximum-output, maximum-input production approach. But input sellers, machinery companies and banks have gained so much from Canada's agriculture wealth that the imbalance threatens to collapse the family farm sector.

High-output, high-input production also increases agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. By reducing farm input use we can increase net farm income *and* reduce GHG emissions.

The solutions to the farm crisis and the climate crisis are largely the same:

- ⇒ Reduce dependence on high-emission petro-industrial farm inputs, and
- ⇒ Rely more on ecological cycles, energy from the sun, and the knowledge and wisdom of farm families.

Low-input agriculture

Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis contains detailed plans and a catalogue of on-farm measures and government policies that could cut farm-based GHG emissions by 30% by 2030 and in half by 2050.

Farmers must lead these discussions and the implementation of solutions or relinquish control to others. Either way, the physics of the atmosphere means business as usual is not an option.

What can we do?

- ⇒ Diversify our production approaches with organic, holistic, and agroecological systems
- ⇒ Make and use fertilizer more efficiently; maximize natural fertility sources
- ⇒ Grow cover crops, and use enhanced crop rotations, inter-crops and multi-crops
- ⇒ Develop more electric-powered farm machinery
- ⇒ Retrofit homes and farm buildings.
- ⇒ Maximize on-farm renewable-energy production, encourage local, co-operatively owned large-scale solar and wind power
- ⇒ Reduce food waste, minimize junk food, rethink biofuels, and look critically at bioenergy and biomaterials schemes
- ⇒ Minimize transport distances and reject over-centralized processing and distribution
- ⇒ Reduce reliance on export expansion, shift national policy to serve more stable domestic markets
- ⇒ Create set-asides, ecological reserves, and alternative land use to recover lost biodiversity through forests, tree bluffs, shelterbelts, and wetlands
- ⇒ Manage manure better to reduce emissions
- ⇒ Promote cattle production that maximizes soil carbon building, grassland ecosystems, and sustainable mixed farms
- ⇒ Minimize methane released by the global oil-and-gas sector

- ⇒ Consider how a carbon levy on agricultural inputs could support farm incomes by helping farmers move toward low-input, low-emission approaches and speed transition to sustainable systems
- ⇒ Create a research and extension agency to help farmers meet emission-reduction targets and stabilize our climate.

Our last chance to save the family farm

The NFU has drawn a roadmap to protect farm families, ecosystems, and future generations, but the journey is not without perils, uncertainties, costs and sacrifices. Yet, these will be much less than the costs of climate chaos and scorched fields if we do nothing.

The climate crisis is a threat, but it is also an opportunity.

Low-input agriculture can free farmers from corporate input suppliers, reduce costs, increase net farm incomes, and reduce emissions. It forces change upon us, and this creates a perhaps our last chance to save the family farm and our rural communities.

We need to act now

We are now in the fourth decade of the climate crisis.

The changes we must make bring with them the possibility of refocusing our farm and food systems toward increasing farm incomes and the number of people on the land taking care of the soil, water, and other species.

We are working to create a future wherein agriculture increasingly re-connects with nature and culture to create a much more integrated, life-sustaining, and community-sustaining agroecological model of food provision, nutrition, and health.

Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis is a roadmap to begin to navigate that transformation.